

# Chapter 4: Preparing for the mid-year examination

Getting ready for your exams does **not** begin the night before, or during Swot Vac, or with any of the various revision programs that occur in the month before the exam.

To achieve your optimum results for the examinations, you should begin your preparation for them as soon as possible, ideally from the beginning of the semester.

Effective preparation involves the following steps:

## 1 During the semester

### Be organised!

Keep up to date in your notes and your class work. If you fall behind in your work, later concepts may not make sense.

### Organise your study routine

Apply effective study habits and techniques over a period of time. You cannot leave things until the last minute, nor can you expect to

take in all of the unit's content during the week before your examination if you have not laid the foundations during the semester.

Whether you have homework or not, you should spend some time **every** night going over your notes or reading your text. Regular revision and relearning helps to encode information into your memory and reinforce semantic networks organised according to meaning and based on your understanding of concepts.

When revising, work actively (underlining, highlighting, jotting down points, drawing diagrams/graphs/flowcharts/concept maps, doing lots of sample questions, etc.). You will remember what you read much better if you *use* it in some way. By dealing with information, you have to *think* about it, which helps reinforce links to your semantic networks, as well as preventing you from falling into a daze and daydreaming.

Test yourself regularly. This not only gives you a regular check on your understanding of

the material but gives you practice in the skills required in answering questions for the exam.

When studying, avoid all other distractions so that your attention is focused. This will not only help information to be absorbed and encoded into your memory, but will also make the process more efficient and take less time.

### Use your class time wisely

Become involved in class discussions and activities, especially those applying concepts to a practical context.

Ask questions (to peers as well as your teacher) whenever you don't understand anything.

### Keep clear notes

Take detailed notes *in your own words* and include as many original examples as you can. This will help to reinforce your understanding of the concepts.

### Keep a glossary

This should not just include key terms or theories from the Study Design, but any term that you feel needs clarification. Where appropriate, try to include an example with your definition to reinforce your understanding.

## 2 Leading up to the exam

### Read and research

Read your text and a variety of other sources. Wider reading not only gives you more information about the concepts or theories, but seeing information in a different form may help to clarify points and assist in your understanding of the information.

### Be physically and mentally prepared

Make sure you have adequate sleep, relaxation and exercise, as well as a balanced diet. These things should be incorporated into your study routine along with your work. Also, know when to give yourself a break and when to stop. To be able to maintain your efficiency, you must take regular breaks in your study routine.

Develop a positive attitude about your abilities. Your marks will reflect the amount of work and preparation you have put in to enhance your potential, but you can only aim to do your best on the day of the exam.

### Prepare carefully

Plan a revision timetable in advance that will build up to the exam itself – then stick to it!

Continue to work actively and test yourself regularly on small blocks of work. Read a chapter or section of your notes, then close your book and try to recall as much as possible.

### Do trial exams and/or past papers

These will not only show you the type of questions to expect, but will give you practice in writing answers. It is a good idea to make the trial exams as much like the real exam as possible (in terms of conditions, time constraints, materials, etc.).

Use trial papers and comments from your teacher to pinpoint weaknesses, and work to improve these areas. While you may concentrate on what you don't know well, also remember to revise all of the other areas as well.

Make sure that you understand the material rather than try to rote learn definitions, especially as much of the Psychology paper will aim to assess how well you can apply the information within the course.

### Develop mnemonics

Mnemonics are techniques to enhance your ability to recall information. While you can learn these strategies from others, you will probably find that ones you invent yourself are easier to remember and apply. It does not matter if some of the images or associations seem absurd or ridiculous – if they help you to remember and understand material for the exam, then they have served their purpose.

### Organise study groups

Working in groups can enhance your revision. By discussing concepts with your peers, you are reinforcing your understanding. When you can explain something to others in the group,

then you will know that you understand that concept. Conversely, others in the group may be able to help you with concepts that you do not know well, especially as things may 'click' when you hear something explained in a different way to your teacher or to the wording in your text.

Study groups can also provide you with some much-needed moral support if you start to get anxious about the exam and your ability to perform.

### Check your state of readiness

- Do you know the time and date of the exam?
- Have you prepared summaries for all of the areas of study? Do you read these regularly?
- Do you understand all the concepts within the course?
- Have you looked at previous exam papers?
- Have you practised writing exam answers?
- Have you done a trial exam under conditions that approximate the actual exam?

## 3 The night before the exam

### Gather together anything you will need for the exam

This includes HB pencils, a pencil sharpener, an eraser, pens and a ruler. Once collected, put them somewhere appropriate so that you will not leave them behind on the morning of the exam.

### Skim lightly over your notes

Revise normally. Don't try last-minute cramming.

### Go to bed early

You may find it hard to get to sleep if you are anxious about the exam. Being rested will help you to better concentrate during the exam, and thereby achieve your optimum performance.

## 4 On the day of the exam

### Don't try to learn anything new

This may interfere with what you have already learned, leading to confusion and an increase in your stress levels.

### Get to school/the exam venue with time to spare

If you are rushing to the exam, you will only increase your stress levels, thereby reducing your ability to do well. Further, if you are late starting the exam, you may not have time to answer all of the questions or you might have to rush to finish (and so increase your chance of making careless mistakes). If you are too late, you will not be allowed to enter the exam.

### Don't worry too much about 'exam jitters'

A certain amount of stress is required to help you concentrate and achieve an optimum level of performance. If, however, you're still feeling very nervous, try some relaxation techniques, such as breathing exercises, to calm yourself down.

### Don't discuss things too much with your peers

This will probably only increase your stress levels, especially if someone asks you a question that you do not know.

## The exam

### The format of the exam

The examinations for VCE Psychology are held at the end of each semester and only cover material within the Areas of Study for that unit.

Each exam has 15 minutes reading time and 90 minutes writing time and is worth 90 marks (effectively about one minute per mark). Both exams are in two sections (multiple-choice and short-answer) and each section of the exam is divided according to each area of study.

## 5 During the exam

### Reading time

#### Use your reading time wisely

You have 15 minutes to read the paper. Read the instructions carefully, noting any directions that must be carried out. Do not use reading time to try to figure out the answers to any of the questions until you have read the whole paper! Read all of the questions to get an overall picture of the paper.

One approach is to read the short-answer questions first, as some of the material in the multiple-choice section may trigger recall or stimulate thinking for your answers.

### Look for key words in the question

To understand what the question is asking, analyse it for key words or instructions.

### Plan your approach to the paper

Leave the most difficult questions until last and go back to them when you have answered the rest. Beginning with questions that you find easy will boost your confidence and give you momentum to finish the exam within the prescribed time.

As some responses may come to mind during reading time, many students prefer to begin with the short-answer questions while answers are still fresh in their mind. Also, as short-answer questions tend to take longer, doing them first gives you the option of quickly putting an answer to multiple-choice questions if time is running out towards the end of the exam. It is easier to guess and have a response to multiple-choice questions than it is for those in the short-answer section. The approach that works best for you should become evident when you practise past papers under exam conditions.

## Section A: multiple-choice questions

### Choose the best answer

The questions will offer you four alternatives, but only one answer will be considered

correct. Usually one of the options will be obviously wrong, maybe using a term that is nowhere in the course and could even be absurd. Another will be wrong after consideration or analysis. The third possibility may be almost right or may appear correct if you don't read the question carefully. The remaining choice will be the correct answer.

While some choices are very clear, others will involve you having to decide against the incorrect alternatives, known as distractors. In such cases, try to justify why the other three options are not appropriate as well as why the chosen response is correct.

A direct approach to these questions involves reading the question and surveying the answers for the best response on the basis of what you know. If, however, the answer does not stand out, then you should try the indirect method of eliminating the alternatives which are obviously or probably wrong. This latter approach will improve your chances should you have to give an educated guess for a response.

### Avoid absolutes and superlatives

Unlike the physical sciences where the same reaction will occur every time, psychology is considered an inexact science because it acknowledges all the variables that can affect how behaviour is displayed from one situation to the next. As such, you should avoid responses that use words such as *only, every, always, invariably and never*, and choose those with words like *generally, usually, ordinarily, frequently, and most often*.

Also be careful if the final alternative is 'all of the above' or 'none of the above'. While these responses can sometimes be the correct answer, you must check that all of the options conform to this answer.

### Don't change an answer unless you are sure that it is wrong

Research has shown that the first response is most often the correct one, especially in the case of multiple-choice questions.

## Don't look for patterns in the answers

The answers are randomly spread throughout and should include equal amounts of each alternative.

## Be careful recording your answers

The answer sheet for this section will be corrected by computer, so you need to be careful when you cross off the desired choice. You should clearly mark the chosen alternative in the question booklet and then transfer that choice onto the answer sheet. If you leave a question until later, make sure that you also leave it blank on the answer sheet; otherwise it will throw out all of the subsequent answers.

AREA OF STUDY

ONE ANSWER PER LINE

A	B	C	D
A	B	C	D
A	B	C	D
A	B	C	D
A	B	C	D
A	B	C	D
A	B	C	D
A	B	C	D

## Section B: short-answer questions

Section B consists of short-answer questions, with differing marks allocated to them.

Questions worth two marks generally focus on the *recall of knowledge* of similar content to notes that you would have in your glossary, such as giving definitions, identifying terms, listing functions or characteristics of a state/condition/phenomenon. When asked to define points or to list their characteristics, you would not be expected to give an explanation that was rote-learned from your text. If you understand the concepts, you should be able to give a clear answer in your own words.

Questions worth three marks are

designed to assess both knowledge *and* understanding, and usually involve some application of the theory or analysis of a given scenario. One of the marks implied in such questions could involve defining or explaining the key concept within the question. The number of marks allocated to the question indicates how many separate points you need to include in your answer.

It is likely that there will be one extended response question asked as part of the short-answer section of the exam. Such extended response questions may be asked in relation to any one or more Areas of Study, research methods and ethics or in any combination of these. The best approach would be to break down the question into its parts and clearly address each in turn, keeping in mind that there may be a few points to make for some parts of the question. Use the marks allocated as a guide for how many pieces of information should be in your answer. Using dot points could help you clearly organise your response for the assessor.

### Write clearly!

Make sure your handwriting is clear and legible, express yourself coherently and be careful with your spelling. All of these will help you demonstrate your understanding to the examiners and enhance your potential score for this section.

When asked to explain a term, never use it as a part of its own definition.

### Attempt all questions!

Maximise your potential score. Marks are not deducted for incorrect answers, whereas you might get some points if you make an educated guess. You will definitely not get any marks if you leave a question blank.

### Coping with mental blocks

If you come across a question that you cannot answer, don't waste time trying to figure it out. The best thing is to move on to the next question and come back to it later. By doing this you will be able to do questions for which you can get marks, as well as pondering the earlier question in the back of your mind so that the solution might come to you later.

## Key terms used in assessment

The following list of words are often used within the questions on the end-of-semester examinations.

### Analyse

To separate and pick out the main points from the information provided.

### Apply

To use, implement or put the key concepts/knowledge into practice.

### Cite

To make reference to other material; to refer to the source of material used.

### Compare

To assess/measure/point out the similarities *and* differences between two concepts or aspects of key knowledge.

### Conclude

To reach a deduction based on the information/experimental results.

### Contrast

To assess/measure/point out the differences between two concepts or aspects of key knowledge.

### Critique

To analyse the subject and make judgements, positive as well as negative.

### Deduce

To arrive at conclusions and/or generalisations based on the given facts.

### Define

To give a clear, precise, accurate meaning of the term.

### Demonstrate

To show, explain and describe the relevant concept.

### Describe

To give a detailed account/informative summary/outline of the key knowledge.

### Discuss

To argue the pros and cons of a subject or theoretical issue.

### Distinguish

To name and characterise the key knowledge, so that it is clear how they are different from each other.

### Evaluate

To judge, assess and weigh the merits of the concept/procedure under scrutiny.

### Examine

To explore/investigate/review the key knowledge.

### Explain

To give or clarify the meaning of a concept or the reason for its occurrence.

### Factors

The facts or circumstances that contribute to a result.

### Generate

To create and produce statements based on the given information.

### Graph

To chart/plot given data.

### Identify

To recognise, detect and point out key concepts in a given scenario or within the information provided.

### Illustrate

To use a diagram and/or examples to help clarify points under discussion.

### Implications

Why something is significant or important; long-term effects.

### Include

To incorporate appropriate material.

### Interpret

To explain and clarify the key knowledge/data/experimental results.

### Justify

To show adequate grounds or reasons for conclusions reached.

### Label

To correctly identify and name tables, graphs, charts and/or diagrams.

### Limitations

Explanation of how something is not useful or not relevant.

### List

To give a series of items, steps or concepts.

### Organise

To arrange and order data or information into convenient and appropriate form.

### Outline

To give the main points/facts, leaving out minor details.

### Recognise

To identify the key knowledge/trends and patterns within the information provided.

### Relate

To show the relationship of various facts/concepts with each other; to connect the present findings to previous research.

### Research

Systematic investigation of a hypothesis pertaining to an aspect of the key knowledge.

### State

To present in a clear, concise manner.

### Suggest

To propose alternate options or directions for further research.

### Summarise

To abbreviate/condense material in order to give a general account of the main features of the relevant information.

### Synthesise

To integrate theoretical information and data.

### Understand

To demonstrate a clear comprehension of the key knowledge, concepts and methods used in research.

### Use

To apply the key knowledge in a given situation.

### With reference to

Include this concept or information within your answer.